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From: CN=Jeff Frithsen/OU=DC/O=USEPA/C=US
Sent: Wed 4/18/2012 10:25:38 PM
Subject: Fw: NEWS UPDATES: Amid lobbying push, EPA defends its Pebble mine review (Greenwire)
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Just sharing as FYI....

Amid lobbying push, EPA defends its Pebble mine review
Manuel Quinones, E&E reporter
Published: Wednesday, April 18, 2012

U.S. EPA is defending its review of large-scale development in Alaska's Bristol Bay watershed amid strong concerns from state leaders, including Attorney General Michael Geraghty.

At issue is the controversial Pebble Limited Partnership's gold and copper mine in southwestern Alaska, which could become one of the largest in the world. Opponents worry the project could hurt tourism and a valuable salmon fishery.

In a recent letter, Geraghty questioned EPA's legal authority to conduct the assessment, since the company has yet to submit permit applications (Greenwire, April 3).

But in another letter earlier this month, EPA Region 10 Administrator Dennis McLerran said the Clean Water Act gave him the authority to establish programs and conduct research for pollution prevention. He also offered the state an olive branch by agreeing to meet to discuss concerns.

"It is very important to me, personally, and to the agency as a whole that the EPA work with the state on the Bristol Bay Watershed Assessment and understand your concerns," McLerran wrote. "From the beginning of the draft assessment process, the EPA has reached out to the state to discuss our approach to better understanding the Bristol Bay resource and to seek your input and involvement at every step along the way."

Groups, including Alaska Native tribes, have been at odds over EPA intervention and a possible pre-emptive Clean Water Act permit veto of the project.

"In order to give due consideration to these conflicting requests," McLerran wrote, "the EPA decided to collect and evaluate available scientific information on Bristol Bay fisheries and their vulnerability to large-scale mining development."

With the draft watershed assessment scheduled for release next month and peer review and public meetings planned in its wake, both opponents and supporters of the mine have intensified their lobbying efforts.

The Pebble Partnership has touted the attorney general's letter and said EPA's assessment might lead to a veto of the project, which state and company officials call illegal and unprecedented (Greenwire, Feb. 9). The agency is not discounting the possibility of such an action.

42 meetings in 2 days

This week, 40 hunting and fishing leaders from 17 states came in Washington, D.C., to voice support for EPA's study and a possible veto. The activists, led by Trout Unlimited, met with White House environmental staffers and EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson.

"The message was, number one, thank you for what you are doing," Rick Halford, a former GOP leader in the Alaska Senate, said in an interview. "Lisa Jackson, I have met with her in Dillingham [Alaska] twice; we have seen a real response and listening."

The group also met with lawmakers, including members of the Alaska delegation, who have spoken out against an EPA veto before the permit process begins.

"They support the science," Halford said of the Alaska lawmakers. "That's a starting point. And I think the science needs to lead to the right conclusion, and I am confident that it will."

"This is approaching a decade of consideration and rhetoric without a permit application," he added. "EPA has the ability to lay out some conditions that at least would be sideboards."

The anti-Pebble activists had more than 40 meetings in two days. They also delivered a letter, signed by hundreds of sporting organizations, in favor of the Obama administration's decision to block the mine.

In London, the Natural Resources Defense Council will deliver 400,000 signatures against the mine to Anglo American PLC shareholders during the company's annual meeting tomorrow. Anglo American is one of Pebble's backers. NRDC has also taken out full-page ads in The New York Times and Financial Times newspapers.

Mine opponents say Bristol Bay supports 12,000 commercial fishing and industry jobs, plus 800 sport

fishing and tourism jobs. The Pebble Partnership said the mine would support year-round jobs in troubled areas and pump in \$620 million in direct and indirect employment spending.

Pebble spent more than \$400,000 in Washington, D.C., lobbying last year, the Center for Responsive Politics reported. Trout Unlimited has spent about \$280,000 on Pebble and other conservation activities.

"We get one bite at this apple," said Gaspar Perricone, co-director of the Colorado-based Bull Moose Sportsmen's Alliance. "And when the resource is gone, it's gone."